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SOUTHERN RIVER TOWN TARGETS ARTISTS WITH INCENTIVES

Following a recent trend in downtown revitalization efforts, the city of Paducah, Ky., has begun actively seeking new inhabitants from the increasingly economically viable arts community. Through tax incentives, low-interest loans, marketing and advertising support, and a host of other benefits, the Paducah Artist Relocation Program aims to strengthen the existing cultural community, rehabilitate neglected parts of the city and increase tourism.

"The city is always looking for innovative programs that encourage development in the

inner city," says Tom Barnett, director of planning for Paducah. "We had gone through a decline for several years because of urban flight — people moving to the suburbs — and all of the investors were leaving."

About a year and a half ago, artist Mark Barone, the program's coordinator and founder, approached city officials with the idea of revitalization through an artist relocation program. Paducah already hosts a vibrant arts community, according to Barone, and the city officials agreed it would be a creative way to restore neglected buildings and



Paducah is home to the Museum of the American Quilter's Society.

houses, and revitalize areas of the city.

"We want to revitalize the Lowertown area by moving people into the area from outside," says Barnett. "...We want to bring in a vibrant group to improve Paducah from what it is today."

Today, Paducah is a southern river town situated on the banks of the Ohio River and host to an established and growing arts community, including the National Quilt Museum, which draws 74,000 visitors a year.

"Artists will find a community that's supportive of their work [when they move here]," says Barnett. "It's a wonderful place to be an artist."

THE INCENTIVES

At the heart of the Relocation Program are the financial incentives offered to artists moving into the historic Lowertown and Downtown areas of Paducah — areas replete with historic buildings and houses in need of some repair. Through the program, Paducah Bank offers artists loan-to-value ratios of up to 100 percent, lower than market interest rates and generous discounts on all closing costs. "It's a way to get the Lowertown

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area up and growing," says Barone.

The Lowertown area, adjacent to the Downtown area, is a historic residential neighborhood zoned for business, giving artists greater flexibility as to where they live and work. "Many of these old houses are huge," explains Barnett, "and artists are able to live ... and work in the same area."



One of the historic houses for sale in Paducah's Lowertown area. Many of the available houses are suitable for use as a residence and studio.

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program also benefits relocating artists who buy, and or renovate, historic buildings to live or work in. Artists would be given a 20 percent tax credit for the "certified rehabilitation of certified historic structures."

Besides the monetary incentives, the Relocation Program offers other benefits, including:

- **Health Insurance** — The Kentucky Arts Council offers six plans to choose from, whether you're a one-person studio artist or a larger crafts business.
- **Web Sites** — Through Frontier Communications, relocating artists are given their own Web sites at no charge, with links to the city's home page.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Mark Barone
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Box 2267
Paducah, KY 42002-2267
(270) 444-8690

• **Marketing and Advertising Support** — The program will promote artists locally and nationally through print advertising. The Visitor's and Tourism Bureau of Paducah will also promote relocating artists.

"We can't compete with the big city in

what it offers overall," says Barnett. "But artists come to Paducah to have a better quality of life, yet still make a living." **TCR**

• **Aaron Pogue** is The Crafts Report's editorial assistant.

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